

Museum and Cultural Advisory Board - Meeting Minutes

The Museum and Cultural Advisory Board met in a regular meeting at the Mesa Arts Center, One East Main Street, third floor, south Studios conference room, on March 10, 2010.

Members Present:

Amanda Buscas
Vincent DiBella
Keiko Dilbeck
Kit Filbey
Rebecca Nolan
Dr. Robbi Venditti

Members Absent:

Peter G. Cook
Douglas Brimhall
Dr. D. Kent Layton
Lars Nielson, Jr.

Staff Present:

Robert Schultz
Jean Kaminski
Tom Wilson
Sunnee Spencer

Guests Present:

Shea Joachim

Rebecca Nolan, Vice-Chair, called the meeting to order at 4:10 p.m.

Approval of Minutes

Rebecca Nolan, Vice-Chair, called for any corrections/additions/deletions to the minutes of February 10. There being none, Kit Filbey made a motion, Vince DiBella seconded, and the Board members present unanimously approved the minutes of February 10. They will be posted on the City's Webpage.

Items from Citizens Present:

There were no citizens present; however, Board member Amanda Buscas announced that the Arizona Commission on the Arts will be holding a listening session at Mesa Arts Center on April 29. The following has been taken from the Arizona Commission's Website regarding the event:

"The Arizona Commission on the Arts has served as Arizona's state arts agency for over 43 years and maintains a strong commitment to thoughtful, inclusive planning and evaluation. It is no secret that the recession has left Arizona's arts and culture industry at a crossroads. We believe that now is the time to evaluate the efficacy of existing programs and consider strategic changes in course. We value your perspective. **Help us chart our agency's course for the next five years, by participating in one of several listening session meetings across our state as a part of our 2010-2015 Strategic Planning Process: *Building an Artistic Future for Arizona*.** You need only bring your unique experiences and your dreams for meaningful change in your communities. There will be several ways to participate in *Building an Artistic Future for Arizona*, including targeted surveys, interviews, focus groups, and the listening sessions. . . To confirm that you plan to participate in any of the statewide listening sessions, send an email to info@azarts.gov at least five days prior to the scheduled meeting. In your email, list your full name, title and/or affiliation, and the city/workshop you will attend."

Introduction of New Board Member Keiko Dilbeck – Douglas Brimhall

Douglas Brimhall was involved in the Arts and Cultural Director interviews on Wednesday and was unable to attend the meeting – Rebecca Nolan, Vice-Chair, assumed the duties. As Vice-Chair, she introduced a new Board member, Keiko Dilbeck. Ms. Dilbeck recently had a baby and is on leave from her career as an English teacher and Student Council Advisor at Red Mountain High School. She is a native of Mesa and is excited to be able to give back to the community that she loves.

Present Information and Discuss – Presentation of Downtown Efforts Underway – Shea Joachim

Shea Joachim works with the Economic Development Office for the City of Mesa. His office has been charged with creating jobs in the City of Mesa that will improve the standard of living, tax base, and will allow the municipality to provide essential services to the community. There are eight employment centers that are targeted; downtown Mesa being one of them. The employment centers are mostly where you would find commercial and industrial activity.

Mr. Joachim presented a PowerPoint on the Downtown Mesa focused efforts and City Council's Strategic Initiatives; the downtown area being one of those that Mr. Joachim is working on. With Light Rail moving to downtown Mesa, some of the focus has been on building economic opportunities along that path. Simply laying the tracks does not guarantee that economic development efforts will be successful. Economic Development's role in downtown efforts are three fold; 1) maximize Light Rail as an economic development tool; 2) provide overall coordination for a variety of City efforts underway; and 3) ensure that the body of work being done is within the City Council's Strategic Initiatives.

Mr. Joachim spoke on two of these areas – 1) Regional Leadership, which includes regional cooperation, sustainability, and most importantly, partnerships. Light Rail is a regional transportation tool; one target is to bring an education institution downtown. MCC and NAU have a presence in downtown Mesa, but they are looking to bolster that; ASU has done well in connecting Tempe to their downtown Phoenix campus because of Light Rail, and Mesa is hoping to do something similar.

Mesa is also looking nationally for this type of partnership. Another key element in partnerships is working with local community agencies such as west Mesa CDC and other such organizations.

The other area covered is – 2) Economic Development that is innovative and business-friendly that includes a variety of strategic tools, re-development of older and vacant areas, and a focus on downtown. Successful Economic Development, stated Mr. Joachim, isn't only about recruiting the next big business, which makes headlines and has its importance, but rather success is a comprehensive or collaborative approach to facilitate opportunity in a community.

The Economic Development office is launching several initiatives to leverage the extension of Light Rail in downtown with facilitating economic opportunities in downtown Mesa. These initiatives are: the ***Downtown Mesa Visioning*** exercises lead by DMA. DMA is engaging stakeholders in downtown and outside of downtown to understand what the community's idea of what downtown Mesa should be; ***Downtown Activation initiative*** that focuses on generating more events in downtown Mesa to turn Main Street into an active place, such as this weekend's "Blues, Baseball, and Balderdash" event; ***Downtown Development*** that is focused more internally on how to approach the re-development of some of the older buildings in downtown; ***Transit Oriented Design & Form*** follows an initiative that is currently underway that focuses on the implementation of a form-based zoning code that puts more of an emphasis on the form of the building (more regulation on what the building looks like, less regulation on what the permitted uses are); ***Central Main Street Plan*** which includes the area of Country Club Drive to Gilbert Road and University to Broadway Roads. In anticipation of the Light Rail extension, Economic Development is looking at how we can best maximize the land use codes around these areas (particularly around the station areas), and how do we transition this anticipated density to the existing residential areas and its inhabitants; and ***Light Rail Downtown Integration*** is the final initiative. There is one last stakeholder group meeting discussion before a final recommendation regarding station location, traffic configuration, and pedestrian access go to Council.

Kit Filbey stated that she received information in the mail regarding the re-development of downtown and the word "cool" was used often. She asked Mr. Joachim what that meant. He responded that his best guess was because of an editorial written a while back and it was suggested that downtown needs to be a "cool" place to be.

Dr. Robbi Venditti asked if the landscape would remain the same on Main Street. Mr. Joachim said that the streetscape that is there today, for the most part, will remain in tact, but the trees down the center of Main Street will have to go to make way for the train. However, the light poles down the center of Main Street will remain and are being integrated into the Light Rail and will be used as joint-use poles.

Vince DiBella asked when considering the different aspects of downtown businesses, residential, and arts and culture, what, in his opinion, will stimulate the economic growth of downtown. Mr. Joachim said he thought that adding more residential, especially closer to Main Street, would be key in stimulating downtown activity and growth.

Rebecca Nolan, Vice-Chair, mentioned that historically property values rise along the Light Rail track. She asked Mr. Joachim if he thinks property value along the original stretch of Light Rail has increased. He replied that it is too early to tell, but, in terms of development that is currently planned and underway, the numbers are somewhat staggering. In terms of private investments, they have seen approximately \$5 of private investment to every \$1 of Light Rail investment along the initial 20-mile-line.

Present Information and Provide Direction – Consider the Following: Drafted Letter to Send to Council; Possibility of a Retreat; Updated Talking Points; Strategies for Upcoming Year – Douglas Brimhall

The draft of a proposed letter to the Mayor and Council included in the Board's packet was discussed. The purpose of the letter is intended to retain a budget line for Public Art and Arts and Cultural Grants within the City's budget. Because so many of the Board members are new to the Board, Rob Schultz, Assistant Arts and Cultural Director, provided some background history on Public Art and the Arts and Cultural Grants.

Public Art does still have a line item on the City's budget because of a balance that remained when Public Art was no longer funded by the City. The balance is being used for some of the renovation at the Arizona Museum for Youth. Arts and Cultural Grants, at one time, had a yearly budget of \$230,000 in its final year, and then during the financial crises four years ago, Arts and Cultural Grants were no longer funded by the City and cut completely from the City's budget. When there were funds available, the grants helped local arts organizations present their programming and remain sustainable. There was a selection process that included a panel that reviewed the applications each year and suggested a grant amount. The panel's recommendations went before the Museum and Cultural Advisory Board for their approval and recommendation to the Mayor and Council. The Mayor and Council had the final approval for grantees and the granted amount. Since the Arts and Cultural Grants were cut, some of the arts organizations have had to fold and/or move to other cities.

After much discussion, and the reality that money is simply not available at this time to revive the Arts and Cultural Grants, there were several suggestions. Among them were to ask for a reasonable request that aligns with the Mayor's Strategic Initiative for Building a Better Mesa and that would, once again, engage and support the local arts organizations. Sunnee Spencer suggested that possibly an Arts Impact Award be given to a deserving local arts organization(s). There was little discussion as to what an Arts Impact Award would entail; it could be discussed in detail and created at the Board retreat.

It was agreed that Rebecca Nolan, Vice-Chair, Dr. Robbi Venditti, and Sunnee Spencer would meet following the meeting to revise the letter according to the agreed upon suggestions. Jean Kaminski will forward the new draft to Douglas Brimhall, Chair, for his approval, and if approved, the Chair will sign the letter on behalf of the Museum and Cultural Advisory Board. The letter will then be mailed to the Mayor and Council for their consideration.

Ms. Nolan, Vice-Chair, asked how Board members felt about a retreat that would begin around noon on a regular Board meeting date and go until 5 p.m. that evening. Rob Schultz commented that five hours may be more time than necessary and suggested possibly a three hour meeting. Having a retreat on a Saturday was also suggested, but dismissed as a possibility; too many people were not available on a Saturday. After some discussion, it was suggested that the June meeting be used as a retreat date (June 9), which would also allow enough time for a new Arts and Cultural Director to be in place. Board members were asked to come prepared to discuss alternate dates and times at the April meeting.

The updated talking points from staff were distributed to the Board and are to be used as a resource and reference when advocating for arts and culture with legislators and the general public.

Staff Reports

Arizona Museum for Youth – Sunnee Spencer

- "Play Ball" opened at the Museum with 285 attendees at a VIP reception. Lisa Anderson and staff worked constantly to acquire media coverage and present the event. When Mayor Smith was asked on a scale of 1 – 10 how the evening went, he commented, "a 10 ½." The following evening, a reception for members had 150 in attendance.
- The Museum submitted, through the City of Mesa, a collaborative grant with the Children's Museum of Phoenix for a project called the S.E.A.L. (Successful Early Arts Learners) program. They are hoping for a Federal Government appropriation.
- The renovation project is coming along well. Staff will be moving back into their offices on March 26.
- May 8 is still the target date for a family breakfast event before opening to the public.
- The Museum's fundraiser this year is titled "Tune Into Art" and will take place on May 1. Board members will be receiving an invitation soon.
- Analee Pace, Fundraising Capacity AmeriCorps Vista volunteer, left the Museum to work at another organization. The Museum hopes to be able to acquire a replacement for her within the next fiscal year.
- Last year the Museum had 1,250 volunteer hours, but since Analee Pace came on board at the beginning of this year, she has raised the contribution from volunteers to \$54,000, which is vital to the Museum, as they have had to shrink their Galley Educator program because of the economy. She also utilized Ageworks and Employability, agencies that pays volunteers to work for organizations.
- The collaboration with the University of Advanced Technology has been going well – the Museum acquired three interns who created an activity in the "Play Ball" exhibit.
- The Museum has a new Website – check it out!

Kit Filbey commented that the VIP reception for "Play Ball" was a first class event – Sunnee credits Lisa Anderson and AMY staff for the success of the event.

Arizona Museum of Natural History – Tom Wilson

- Saturday, March 6, marked the Museum's first gala event, Arizona Adventure. The night was a big success, enjoyed by everyone who attended.
- Mesa Grande's opening event will take place on Saturday, March 27, at 8 a.m. Congressman Mitchell from District 5 will be attending. The Neighborhood Association is sponsoring a pancake breakfast that morning. This opening will be special, as the trail is now complete. Part of the funding for the trail is from the Heritage Fund, which gave the Museum a \$100,000 grant that was swept and then restored and has been swept once again. The Museum is being reimbursed at 40% of cost from the Heritage fund because of match funds that were in place. Other funding resources will be used to finish the project.
- The Museum held a Volunteer Recognition breakfast at the Mesa Country Club sponsored by the Museum of Natural History's Guild. Volunteers have contributed hours that would total the equivalent of eight full time employees and contribute approximately 40% of staff time at the Museum in a given year.
- Dr. Wilson has been elected as Vice-Chair to the Arizona Humanities Council.

Mesa Arts Center/Mesa Contemporary Arts – Rob Schultz

- Spring Break Camp begins next week, which ties in with the National Geographic Live Series on “Army Ants and Flying Frogs” with Ecologist/Photographer Mark Moffett. The kids will study insects and amphibians and will be working with clay to create creatures.
- MAC has received 250 applications for the Volunteer/Events Coordinator position. Interviews will take place next Monday, March 15. Staff hopes to have a new person in place by mid-April.
- The glass courtyard is completed and classes have begun. Money for the project came from Cultural Impact Fees. The space is much larger and safer for teachers and students.
- Mesa Contemporary Arts have three exhibitions: Theresa Sullivan’s Station Identification, the 31st Annual Contemporary Crafts exhibition, and Chris Rush’s portraits of children and adults, often with disabilities.

Acting Directors Report – Rob Schultz for Kari Kent

Three candidates returned today to continue interviews with staff and City Management for the Arts and Culture Director’s position. If finalists are selected, they will return one more time to meet with staff and other stakeholders.

This weekend the City of Mesa and DMA are hosting a festival titled “Blues, Baseball, and Balderdash.” The event will be Friday night from 6 – 10 p.m. and Saturday from 10 a.m. – 9 p.m. The Arizona Museum for Youth will be opened until 7 p.m. each evening. The Arizona Museum of Natural History, because of staff cuts, has to rely on volunteers to be open in the evening and is having difficulty obtaining volunteers for this weekend – they may or may not be open in the evening.

It was asked what will happen to downtown events during the Light Rail construction – will it move to another street or be halted until construction is complete? Mr. Schultz did not know the answer, but anticipates that as construction begins, more information will be forthcoming.

A question was also raised regarding single people coming to the Arizona Museum for Youth to see the “Play Ball” exhibit. Sunnee Spencer, Youth Museum Administrator, said that staff have been trained and are aware of single people issues in the Museum. They also receive notices on offenders and are on the lookout for such people. It has never been a problem in the past, and staff keeps a close eye out when there are singles and children in the Museum.

Report on Conferences and/or Meetings/Performances Attended: Board Members – Information Only

Rebecca Nolan echoed the comment on the VIP opening for “Play Ball” stating that it was first-class.

Amanda Buscas complimented Dr. Tom Wilson on the Museum’s FaceBook editor stating that the updates are fun and interesting.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 5:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kari Kent, Acting Director
Arts and Cultural Department